Senate Committee Approves Otepka; Floor Fight Likely

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The Senate Judiciary Committee approved President Nixon's appointment of Otto Otepka to the Subversive Activities Control Board by a lopsided vote of 12 to 3 yesterday.

Senate Majority Whip Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) indicated he would renew his opposition to Otepka's confirmation in the $36,000-a-year job when the issue reaches the Senate floor.

"I don't think there is room on the Subversive Activities Control Board for someone whose basis of strength is the support of the John Birch Society and the Liberty Lobby," Kennedy told newsmen.

Senate Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen (R-Ill.) predicted smooth sailing for Otepka despite the flurry of liberal protests.

Discounts Complaints

Otepka, Dirksen asserted, "had all the answers" at the closed meeting that preceded the vote. He discounted complaints about Otepka's support from members of extremist groups as "awfully weak."

Formerly the State Department's chief security evaluater, Otepka has been lionized by conservatives ever since former Secretary of State Dean Rusk tried to fire him in 1963 for "unauthorized, underground" teamwork with the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee.

Demoted instead, Otepka kept fighting for reinstatement, but he was turned down earlier this year by Secretary William P. Rogers. In March, Mr. Nixon, who had promised Otepka "justice," named him to the SACB.

Move by Supporters

Waiting in the wings is still another move by Otepka's staunchest supporters on Capitol Hill that could put him in charge of evaluating security risks not just for the State Department but for the entire Executive Branch.

Sponsored by Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman James O. Eastland (D-Miss.), Dirksen and others, the bill would set up a new Security Administration for Executive Departments answerable only to the President. Other provisions would permit the chairman of the SACB to double as chief administrator.

The present chairman of the SACB is John W. Mahan, but he is a Democrat and his term expires next year.

Committee approval of Otpeka's appointment as a Board member came on the heels o a staff report claiming that the organization supplying most of the financial aid for Otepka's 5½-year legal fight for reinstatement—the American Defense Fund—"has no connection of any kind" with the Birch Society or the Liberty Lobby or Liberty Lobby founder Willis Carto.

Connections Denied

The memo was prepared by J. G. Sourwine, chief counsel for the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. In the report, Sourwine also quoted Otepka as stating that "he does not have and has not had any formal or informal connections with the John Birch Society, or the Liberty Lobby, or Mr. Willis Carto, or any other persons or organizations known to him to be actively associated with any of the above three."

Sourwine said Otepka has met Carto several times and once had luncheon with him, but said "nothing was discussed except the legal aspects of Mr. Otepka's case."

The Liberty Lobby, however, has in the past also offered for sale or distribution a 28-minute color film, "The Otepka Case," which, according to the Lobby's brochures, "exposes the skullduggery engaged in by the leftist and pro-Communists in Government departments . . ."

It had its premiere in Boston at the 1967 New England Rally for God, Family and Country, an annual gathering sponsored by many John Birch Society leaders.